

PRESS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Divisions of Boating and Waterways, Historic Preservation and Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation

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California State Parks to Launch Pilot Program for Day-Use Reservations at McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park Starting May 15



View of the iconic falls at McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park. Photo from California State Parks.

BURNEY – To reduce the impacts of overcrowding and to create a significantly improved visitor experience, California State Parks will begin a pilot program requiring reservations to visit McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park (Burney Falls) on Friday-Sunday and holidays during peak visitation season, starting Friday, May 15, through Sunday, Sept. 27. The goals of this new day-use reservation system, which will not be required Monday-Thursday, are to

alleviate the strain on the park's resources and infrastructure, and to improve visitor safety during the busiest summer days, when large crowds often overwhelm the park and the surrounding area. The public can make reservations starting today.

“Burney Falls is a crown jewel of the California State Park System, and we want all visitors to have an enjoyable and memorable experience when visiting this one-of-a-kind destination,” said State Parks Director Armando Quintero. “By allowing visitors to make a reservation in advance, we can help keep crowds manageable and not push the park’s resources past the breaking point. I thank our guests for their understanding as we work together to create a better visitor experience while helping to preserve this iconic place for generations to come.”

How will the pilot program for reservations work?

Under the pilot program, reservations purchased in advance via the [Burney Falls webpage](#) will be required for day-use entry. The park will offer 103 parking passes valid between 8 a.m. and noon, an additional 103 passes valid between 1 and 5 p.m., and 35 passes valid for the entire day. The cost will be \$10 per vehicle plus a 55-cent processing fee. Senior and disabled discounts apply if eligible, as well as entry for annual pass holders, though reservations are still required. Same-day reservations will not be accepted.

Reservations will be limited to one per vehicle per day. Vehicles must be passenger vehicles requiring only one standard-size parking space. Passenger vehicles trailering a boat for day-use must also make an advanced reservation, pay their boat launch fees upon arrival at the park, and will be required to park in the marina day-use lot, which has limited pull-through parking capacity. Oversized vehicles, vehicles pulling other types of trailers, buses, and recreational vehicles are not allowed in the park during the day-use reservation period. Tour buses and commercial tour groups are not allowed in the park without a pre-approved permit.

Guests with a campground or cabin reservation, including those with boats and trailers, will not need to make a separate day-use reservation; it will be automatically included with the overnight reservation. Check-in time for camping reservations is after 2 p.m. and will continue to be strictly enforced. It is anticipated that the new day-use reservation system will help alleviate the wait times required for campers to enter and re-enter the park. Day-users with a boat reservation from the concessionaire-operated marina will need to also make a day-use reservation.

Why the change?

With its breathtaking waterfall, natural scenery and access to world-class outdoor recreation, Burney Falls is one of the most iconic parks in the California State Park System and a popular destination for visitors from all over the world – but it wasn’t always this way. Despite being California’s second-oldest state park, for much of its nearly 100-year history, Burney Falls experienced limited visitation due to its rural location in northeastern California and lack of publicity. For generations of visitors, it had the reputation of a small, family-oriented park and one of California’s best-kept secrets. However, over the past decade, and especially with the growth of social media, that secret is now world-famous.

Annual visitation has approximately doubled since 2015, pushing the park beyond a sustainable capacity and creating a host of problems, including an increase in erosion,

damage to sensitive vegetation and sacred tribal land, traffic backups, illegal parking, public safety concerns and sanitation issues. Park facilities built in the 1960s were not designed to handle current visitation levels. The annual surge in visitation has resulted in long lines to enter the park and frequently creates unsafe traffic conditions on State Route (SR) 89, which threatens public safety and the park's resources. Campers with reservations are hesitant to leave the park, knowing that it may take up to two hours to re-enter on busy days. Due to limited parking, Burney Falls will typically reach its capacity on weekends, forcing the park to close for several hours each day. Visitors who have driven multiple hours to reach the picturesque park are met with the unfortunate news that they can't enter and will need to try again later.



Traffic along SR-89 and cars being ticketed for illegally parking along the highway. Photos from California State Parks.

If lucky enough to gain entry, visitors inside the park are met with extreme overcrowding, long restroom lines, and overflowing trash cans instead of a peaceful, rejuvenating experience at one of the nation's most awe-inspiring natural landmarks. To avoid crowds, off-trail use increased to such a level that the park was forced to close access to the base of Burney Falls during summer 2024 to complete a trail restoration project to prevent a catastrophic trail failure.


Because of the park's small footprint, proximity to SR-89 and the sensitivity of the surrounding area, there are limited expansion options to better accommodate more visitors without additional impacts to resources.

Benefits of day-use reservation system

To help address these issues, State Parks is testing the day-use reservation system during the busiest time of the year. Day-use reservation systems have become a common feature at many national and state parks throughout the country since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. As a leader in outdoor recreation, State Parks is committed to adopting new tools to meet the increasing challenges facing parks in an effective and equitable manner. Reservation systems have been tried and tested throughout the country and have helped alleviate overcrowding and improve the visitor experience. With the ability to reserve park entry ahead

of time, visitors to Burney Falls can make the most of their time outdoors — with less stress and the confidence that they will have access to the park for a memorable and positive experience.

After the pilot program this summer, State Parks will evaluate its effectiveness and make adjustments if necessary for future peak visitation periods.

|  <h2 style="margin: 0;">Do I need a day-use reservation at Burney Falls?</h2> | |
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| No Reservation Needed | January - May 14 |
| | May 15 - September Monday - Thursday |
| | October - December |
| Advance Reservation Required* | May 15 - September Friday - Sunday |
| | Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day |
| | Number of Vehicle Passes Issued Daily 8 a.m.-noon — 103 passes 1-5 p.m. — 103 passes All day — 35 passes |

*Pass quantities may be adjusted based on impacts from new reservation process. Reservations limited to one per vehicle per day. Vehicles must be passenger vehicles requiring only one standard-size parking space. Guests with a campground or cabin reservation will not need to make a separate day-use reservation. Day-users with a boat reservation from the concessionaire-operated marina will need to also make a day-use reservation.

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